A second British record of *Mussidia nigrivenella* Ragonot (Lep.: Pyralidae)

A female of the pyralid moth *Mussidia nigrivenella* was taken at light at Dungeness Bird Observatory on 12th August 1994. This is only the second British record of this species, and the first "at large" for this pest species. The last record was in a London cocoa warehouse in 1930. The moth is illustrated in Goater, 1986, *British pyralid moths*. Other immigrant species were noted on the night of capture, including the Tawny Wave, *Scopula rubiginata* Hufn. My thanks to Mark Parsons and Bernard Skinner for their help in identifying this moth.– S.P. CLANCY, Delhi Cottage, Dungeness, Romney Marsh, Kent TN29 9NE.

The scarcity of Vanessid butterflies

I would like to accord to an extent with the views of Mr A.A. Allen (*Ent. Rec.* **106**: 228), in his observation that Vanessid butterflies seem to be rather more scarce than they were a few years ago, or at least in my youth, which is not more than a decade ago. Despite a general decline in butterfly numbers, the so called "garden" species have done relatively well, we are led to believe. However, though they may be thirsty visitors to the buddleia, they rarely breed in gardens, and I suspect that their breeding sites are where the problems lie.

Nettles are less common where I live than when I was a teenager. Then, I would collect larvae in June to allow them to mature, as the local cricket club declared war on nettles beyond the boundary line, where they grew in the classic sheltered corner, and where females of *Aglais urticae* and *Inachis io* would deposit their ova each year. This was done easily enough by chopping them down. Now totally unnecessary spraying has destroyed the nettle patch, and so many like it, and I have looked for the larvae in the immediate area for five years and not found them. One imagines this has been a familiar story in thousands of such settings, and thus many suburban environments have become hostile for these species.

The vanessidae do not seem to like the clumps found in fields, in the exposed middle, and in many agricultural settings pesticide residues are likely to be high. We have not yet seen results from set-aside, but farmers are allowed to limit the growth of plants they consider undesirable, and I suspect that nettles fall into this category. So even these most far-ranging and opportunistic of butterflies may, if my observations and those of Mr Allen are representative, have found themselves pushed out of their humble havens on waste ground and other marginal land.

We should, as a society, become alarmed when our scarce butterflies became rare: We did bolt the stable door, but only when some of the stalls were empty. How alarmed should we feel about the degradation and impoverishment of our environment now that today's common butterflies look like being tomorrow's rarities?– DR C.J. SMITH, 20 Gately Road, Sale Moor, Cheshire M33 2RQ.